



Pod – report

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TITLE

Give your report an informative title and mention the podcast that you are putting online.

Title of report: The journey of the cyber-librarian

Podcast: The information journey

CONTEXT

Which current international and/or local trends are triggers for your investigation?

Information is easy to get – no one sits around and wishes a librarian was around to help – but rather wishes everything was as easy as Google

The vast amount of information available is one reason for transforming the way we conduct research and acquire knowledge

Critical thinking, knowledge construction and reflection are the processes that surround information

Today's generation as they constitute the Millennial are comfortable and confident in online environment yet they are a generation that is plagued with impatience and settle for ease of access instead of quality. Given this, it becomes rather important that learners are empowered with the appropriate Information literacy skills to stay 'afloat' in the sea of information. This is why the library is re-inventing itself and moving away from the traditional role of a repository of books, to a service that equips learners with the tools and skills that empower a learner to locate appropriate information, evaluate it and appropriately apply it

Not only have our students changed – technology has changed the way information is created and disseminated

Technology has changed how we socialise, behave and communicate.

Podcasting and other such web 2.0 technologies can also transform learning

and knowledge transfer to adapt in this new environment

Podcasting in libraries is not a new concept. Libraries use it to disseminate news and marketing information or run audio tours. I am looking at using it as an instructional tool.

So podcasts is but another tool, a medium through which a message can be delivered.

The message being that libraries can equip the learner with information literacy skills

We are not concerning ourselves with the technological skills as our audience – the millennial have a pretty good grasp of the technology, but the focus now is through using this technology that they are comfortable with, and that they are using, we create an online presence where we take the library and more especially what we offer, to the student rather than waiting for the student to come to the library. So in a sense we are moving in the direction of a virtual library not only in terms of our resources moving from predominantly print based to online format but also taking information literacy beyond the confines of a building to where the student is, which is online.

University students are generally aware of the library information resources available, yet don't access it as frequently as previous generations
They do not ask for help when using either physical or virtual library resources

What has become evident is that students don't read anymore, at least not as much as they ought to. So the library has embarked on a project to encourage such a culture, through the establishment of book clubs, acquiring popular general reading material and the use of kindles for e-books.

So we are trying to establish a new culture in an information rich society.

Generation of millennial (today's teenagers) have changed the ways libraries need to package information literacy as we have to compete with divided attention spans

Podcasts give libraries an answer as a useful learning tool in addressing different learning styles –especially for auditory and visual learners

It is a complementary tool to the more traditional methods

People want information on demand and allocating time to find information has always been hard what with student's schedules, employment demands, and social pressures.

Podcasts allow choice and enables users to be in control of what they invest

their time in

Podcast allows us the opportunity to challenge the library stereotype and demonstrate a lively library. It adds a new dimension to the library.

CHALLENGES

Which challenges and/or opportunities exist in your own teaching environment which you could possibly address through podcasting?

The Information Literacy course is not a mandatory course. It does not carry any credits and does not contribute to any formal assessment.

Sure as facilitators of the course we try to build in formative and summative assessment, but to what end?

We comfort ourselves in believing that we are contributing to the greater good, an informed, literate society that values information and the research process, but do the other stakeholders, educators, academic structures share this opinion?

The reality is that the Academic program prescribes to some extent that content and skills directly related to the discipline form the core of the student activities and engagement. So does Information Literacy skills feature in this mix. Sadly no! at least not for the majority. So it is this kind of lethargic attitude from most academics that filter through to the learners.

Can we blame the academics? Well let's look at the climate issues affecting the institution. Student protest and disruptions are part of the culture and causes a fair amount of disruption leaving lecturers in a 'tizz' in trying to complete the syllabus. So what is the one course that can be forsaken, IL off course. To make my point, a lecturer once said to me that although his students did not attend any library programs, they still passed.

But is it about passing or failing or are we investing in the quality of student that we send out into society or is it about boosting our throughput numbers?

These and other such issues impact on the student attendance to the IL courses.

So if the learners are not coming to the library, lets take the library to the

learners.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Phrase a problem in the form of a question.

Can Mobile learning become a reality for the DUT library, as a vehicle in delivering information literacy?

THEORY

Which educational theories seem most relevant to your investigation? Briefly describe each theory's key characteristics.

(Some examples are connectivism; constructivism, harnessing technology to enhance learning; mobile learning in higher education; the millennial student, etc)

The net generation have pushed us to adapt what we do and what we offer to meet the need of a technologically savvy audience. Librarians have to a large extent become 'accidental trainers' (Weiss 1997) in that we train learners on the effective retrieval and use of information. We impart knowledge and wisdom in preparing learners to function in an information rich society, by addressing their searching behaviour, which is generally characterised by impatience, and they tend to settle for ease of access instead of quality. There is a call for the blended librarian. One who can recognize the digital disconnect and do something about it (Kolb 2008) .Given the direction that librarianship is going what with us teaching Information literacy, the librarian of today must be able to take the traditional role of the librarian and combine that with the functionality of Information technologist and Instructional designer, and formulate instructional offerings that address the information behavior of learners, and at the same time taking cognisance of the audience, by using the appropriate communication and teaching methods. (Bell & Shank 2007).

Gardner's multiple intelligences theory and my practical experience has made it evidently clear that not everyone thinks and /or learns the same way and so why do we insist on teaching Engineers to search and learn like librarians do? They are visual learners. When visiting a doctor, would you be happy with him saying that I know how to do open heart surgery because he read the articles about it or with someone that knows because he witnessed and was part of the learning experience? (RADMASTE Centre 2008)

Greg Whitby talks about how the pedagogical DNA of teachers needs to

change given that they have become entrenched in teaching the way they always have for so long. Librarians have fallen into the same category. We need to acknowledge this information rich environment, within which the learners subscribe to a constructivist approach to learning. (Youtube - 21st century pedagogy 2007)

METHODOLOGY

What is action research?

How have you used the methodology's structure for your investigation?

By definition, Action research is a reflective process that aims at improving by engaging in the process on continued assessment and evaluation with the intention to correct deficiencies or to improve on quality by addressing efficiency and effectiveness of processes involved and the output.

I would like to say that we started by recognised a problem and investigated ways of dealing with it but it was not so. We learnt about the tool and then considered areas that it could address. Nevertheless the need for reflection on the action is crucial in that it required me researching the possible implementation of a new medium into an existing practice. The investigation involved identifying an area that could benefit by considering the content , the audience and their information searching behavior.

What we may find in time to come, is that this method of communication doesn't work as well as we would like it to. This realisation too is part of that reflective practice and maybe we may decide that we need to change to some other medium or some other strategy. It is important in this process that we recognize that this does not constitute a failure of the project or a waste of effort but it contributes to our experiences and the greater body of knowledge, as it contributes to the learning process.

DESIGN

The vision

What is the vision for your use of podcasting in your course in the long term? What will it aim to achieve, how will you share your podcasts with your students, and what reaction do you anticipate from your students?

Podcasts provide another medium through which the library could reach students. It is envisaged that a series of podcasts/vodcasts be created, addressing different aspects of Information Literacy and could be distributed to

students as downloadable files from the library website and to attach syndication to it.

Podcasting in Higher Education at DUT

How will the podcasting encourage interaction/ collaboration/ engagement/ participation/ active learning?

Learning and teaching especially in higher education institutions need a radical adjustment in the 21st century

Technology and more specifically Web 2.0 has reshaped our world to the point where Technology can't be avoided

Education is no longer confined to the classroom and does not revolve around the wise old professor. But the student is at the centre. And the learning happens all around them be that the school, the community, home, library, and online. To the point that they are experiencing a more stimulating and rich environment outside of school, than in school.

We cannot continue the way we have been doing things in the past, as the learners have changed, the context within which learning takes place has changed, social, economic and political dynamics change consistently however our teaching and the services we offer stay the same

We are ultimately preparing learners for the job market and the job market is not requiring people that know how to memorise. We need to move away from rote learning and ensure that learners are endowed with the abilities to find-validate-synthesise leverage-communicate-collaborate and problem solve

We should Use the technology to enhance the experience and assist in making this transition in preparing lifelong, independent learners

Prof Sugata Mitra , the researcher that brought us the findings of the 'hole in the wall project' said in an interview where he was asked as to what he thought would be the future of universities. He suggested that Universities would be bodies of research and assessment. That the teaching and learning will no longer be confined to the lecture rooms but will be available in the students pockets via the cell phones and its internet connection. (Mitra 2009)

There may be some truth to what he is suggesting given the way that technology has influenced our lives and specifically the delivery of education

Take the learning to where the student is.

Working smart

How will you use podcasting to make your life easier?

Initially I don't see it as making anything easier. There is a fair amount of work in creating the podcast, what with deciding on the appropriateness of the medium for the content. How to package the information using podcast, making it appealing to the audience, not to mention the actual production aspects. It is equally important to recognize our own limitations in terms of the use of voice, technological aspects, etc.

However once the ground work is done, some of this content may be re-usable depending on the content and the audience. So what worked this year may or may not work for next year.

Personally I find myself stretched between sharing my time across pre and post delivery, as well as delivery itself, which personally exhausts me both physically and mentally. This leaves little time and energy for innovation or investigation into improved/alternative teaching methods.

This use of technology may address this problem.

Student Attendance

How do you think podcasting will affect student attendance? How will you design your podcasts to enable students to get the best from face to face meetings and learning via electronic media?

Face to face interaction should generally be from a facilitative dimension, at least if we want to encourage independent learning. However the rules change when it comes to skills transfer, as a degree of show and tell and hand holding is necessary. A podcast should be as a means to re-enforce the face to face engagement and vice versa.

Feasibility

What infrastructure and resources (a) are, and (b) ought to be in place in your learners' environment in order for this project to be successful?

Clearly there is a need for technical or information literacy skills as the lecturer is now graduating from being the content specialist to being an instruction design specialist. At least this is how I see myself in this process. I am now required to fulfill the role of a blended librarian, bringing together functionality of the traditional librarian, an information technologist (the ability to use

technology to achieve an outcome) and an instructional designer (being able to find the best fit in delivering the appropriate content using technology and applying the appropriate learning and teaching strategies. (Bell & Shank 2007).

The individual needs Skills-producing material for online environment

Many Computer software programs are available with an open source license arrangement, however these programs offer the minimum capability. To produce qualitative podcast, one needs both high powered computers as well as licensed software. Garageband software seems to be a very good option however is restricted for Apple Mac machines and is only accessible on one machine at the e-learning facility. This has become quite restrictive, in that one is confined to one machine within available time slots. Unfortunately inspiration/innovation/ creativity cannot be contained like this. Uploading podcast into an e-learning environment does present its own problems in that it becomes restrictive based in file sizes. Also the blackboard environment, in as much as it has its strengths, the one aspect that works against it is the interface. It is not the easiest to navigate and so would require a type of interface orientation.

IMPLEMENTATION

Pilot activity

Describe the pilot activity you have tried out with two or three volunteer students/participants (or your colleagues!)

As part of the pilot study, I was expected to 'test drive' the product of our efforts, the actual podcast on volunteer participants.

I opted to have them access the podcast from Youtube as opposed to uploading it into the Blackboard environment. The reason for this is that I didn't want the experience being confused with the volunteers struggling with familiarising and learning the blackboard interface, but wanted them to focus on the podcast itself and therefore opted for an environment that was fairly easy to use and most are familiar with.

Relevance

How does this activity aim to address the challenges and opportunities you have identified?

This activity is part of the action research cycle in that it may highlight areas that need attention before we expose the bigger community to.

As producers , our opinions pertaining to our production may become

compromised and subjective. There is therefore merit in getting an objective yet constructive opinion from independent 'guinea pigs'

Atkinson (2010) uses the phrase 'writing once, publish many', where he talks about a single lesson being packaged in different formats like a classroom lecture, on a blog, on youtube or even as a podcast. This will probably reach a larger more diverse audience as each of these mediums addresses the various learning styles namely visual, auditory and kinesthetic learners. (RADMASTE Centre 2008).

The reality is that these podcast may appeal to some and not necessarily all, but that's fine, as another medium may address another group. We keep trialing different strategies and will reach some kind of balance within which we capture the majority

Feedback

What feedback did you receive from volunteer students/participants? Provide a basic analysis.

The feedback was positive in that it showed appreciation of a fresh perspective to library instruction. The use of a non-traditional method was welcomed.

Access to the podcast was easy and the short duration was appreciated. The use of the analogy clarified the research process in a simplistic succinct manner that generated interest.

The use of background music highlighted the impact and the use of voice. The voice was a bit soft.

The use of visuals added a new dimension to the podcast, but seemed limited with the kind of effects that could have been incorporated.

REFLECTION

Assumptions

Which assumptions did you make about yourself and your learners? What did you learn from your assumptions after implementing the activity?

The use of the analogy of the search for the ship, Titanic did not get the expected result in that not all participants were familiar with the story of the titanic, however fortunately the focus was not on the story of the titanic but highlighted the processes involved in the search for it which was related to the search for information. It would have been nice if all participants could make the link.

Future adjustments

In the light of the feedback received and the lessons you have learnt, how will you adapt your activity and/or your classroom during the next action research cycle?

The area that I feel needs adjustment is with regard to access to the production tools. Unfortunately the Windows based open source software is fairly limited and access to the Apple Mac does present a degree of restriction. This is particularly important when I think about those instances when I was bitten by the 'creative bug' but could not get to the 'Mac', partly because it was in the middle of the night and off course when you do get back to the office, you get caught up in the routine of the day. I would like to see the institution investing in an institutional license, to some decent software for a windows environment given that it is the dominant operating system on campus

Impact

What impact do you envisage this intervention could make, or has made on either or all of the following: you, your learners, the curriculum and the institution?

Once these podcast have been produced, I see us reaching more students that we currently do. In my opinion it will lighten the load of Subject librarian in respect to the time that they spend in lecturing information literacy. Sure the statistics indicating the number of students in a session will decline, but we will be reaching them in a virtual environment. For me the number of students sitting in my class does not reflect the amount of learning that has taken place. Half the class could have been sleeping. So I see podcast being the tool through which we could take library instruction to the student.

Lessons learnt

What lessons have you learnt in the various phases during your year as a DUT Podcaster?

There is still a long way to go. We are taking baby steps which are important as we can learn along the way and adjust if necessary. We should not just jump into something because the trend is that everyone else is doing it. It is important

to consider as to whether it fits us, given our dynamics.

During this pilot study, I enjoyed that I was given freedom to innovate and explore possibilities. I believe that who you are as a person, comes out in the kind of work you do. I enjoyed that my passion for technology was re-energised and this time I intend maintaining it.

Getting students to recognize the potential benefit of using their podcast for education material is not going to be easy. In terms of getting library content distributed using m-learning is another battle for me , which will have to start by me first convincing my fellow librarians.

I guess we need to be agents of change and slowly make an impact on our environment.

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